

Employment First

Helping Georgians Go To Work



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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Employment is the First Option

By Executive Director Sean T. Casey

"It doesn't belong to any one agency or organization. It belongs to the people with disabilities who will benefit from it."

That's what GVRA's Charlie Miller said about Georgia's Employment First Act (HB 831), which passed the Senate 54-1 and is on its way to Governor Nathan Deal for signature. The legislation establishes employment as the first and preferred option for people with disabilities receiving state services. The council it creates will be comprised of state leaders, community stakeholders, people with a variety of disabilities, a business representative, and a family member. Read the full Act here: <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20172018/HB/831>

Rep. Terry Rogers (R-District 10) sponsored the Bill on the House side, and Sen. Mike Dugan, (R-District 30), sponsored on the Senate side. As he introduced HB 831 on the Senate floor Thursday, March 15th, Sen. Dugan told his colleagues, "This bill will help people be contributing members of society and just be able to have a job."

Sen. Nan Orrock (D-District 36) voiced support for HB 831, calling it "a win-win for employers, employees and the general public."

Sen. Steve Henson, (D-District 41 and Senate Democratic Leader), acknowledged the role of the business community in establishing an Employment First culture. He said, "I wanted to come down to thank the thousands of employers who help employ people with disabilities so that they can work, have better lives.... longer lives and more enjoyable lives."

The final comment prior to the vote came from Sen. President Pro Tem Butch Miller (R-District 49), who summarized the founding principle of Employment First by saying, "This bill really is about helping people who want to help themselves."

We now await HB 831 to be scheduled for signing. Then we get down to work, as the Governor appoints members to the Council, which will make recommendations for legislation and policies that support the Employment First agenda. We look forward to ongoing partnership with all the stakeholders who made the passage of Georgia's Employment First Act possible, and we are eager to watch doors open for the individuals we serve as they are offered more options for success.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "S. T. Casey".

Sean T. Casey
Executive Director



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Mike Dugan



State Senator Mike Dugan, a Republican, was elected to the State Senate for the Georgia 30th District in early 2013.

Senator Dugan represents portions of Carroll, Douglas and Paulding counties.

Senator Dugan serves as the Chairman of the Senate Economic Development and Tourism Committee and as Secretary of the Veterans, Military and Homeland Security Committee, Secretary of the Public Safety Committee and Secretary of the Transportation Committee.

Sen. Dugan served as a Governor's Floor Leader from 2015 to 2016. Prior to being elected senator, Senator Dugan was President of the Carrollton Kiwanis Club and served on the Executive Board of the Carrollton Housing Authority and West Georgia Athletic Foundation Executive Committee.

Sen. Dugan enlisted in the U.S. Army after graduating from college with his Bachelor's Degree. He was later commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry. He became an Army Ranger and a Master Paratrooper. Sen. Dugan is proud to have spent more than 20 years in the Army before retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2008. During his career, he was deployed to more than 32 countries, including hostile fire deployments in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Senator Dugan is a local contractor at the Carrollton branch of RA-LIN and Associates. RA-LIN maintains a reputation as one of the most respected providers of construction services in the Southeast.

Senator Dugan attended Bowdon High School, where he played football and ran track. He graduated from the University of West Georgia (UWG) with a Bachelor's Degree in History. He also earned his Master's Degree in Organizational Development from UWG.

He is married to Missy, and they have two children; daughter, Meghan and son, Beau. Sen.

Dugan is a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Carrollton.



Educating Employers

How GVRA Is Working With Major Brands



Coca Cola, Georgia Power and UPS are just a few of the big-name corporate partners who have joined with GVRA on a statewide Business Leadership Network (BLN) to help foster careers for individuals with disabilities.

The concept for the BLN initially came out of conversations among GVRA Employment Services staff in April of last year. The goal at that time was to organize a local organization similar to the United States BLN, which aims to unite business around disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain and marketplace. The first organization that signed on to the Georgia BLN was Georgia Power, and from there, GVRA recruited other national and international—though Georgia-based—employers, with the total number of organizations in the network currently at just short of a dozen.

And it will continue to grow in the future as more and more businesses begin to recognize the bottom-line benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities both as a means of securing a strong and productive

workforce and as a means for expansion into an untapped market, said Business Relations Manager Lawrence Davis.

As part of the local BLN, GVRA had the opportunity to sit down with some of the decision makers at Coke, and from this conversation, the world's largest soft drink manufacturer decided to explore their own practices surrounding individuals with disabilities. From that, the "This-Ability" campaign was born, with the program featuring a new push to not only hire individuals with disabilities into the ranks but also to find ways to include those with disabilities in their marketing and promotional practices.

"It's all about education," Lawrence said. "There are misconceptions about hiring someone who has a disability. Companies may think their insurance is going to go up, or they worry about accommodations. In reality though, these workers will help them grow their business and become even more competitive in the marketplace."



Spreading the Word

From Leading Awareness Organizations

March is recognized as an awareness month for both Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and Cerebral Palsy (CP).

From the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America (MSAA): "Multiple sclerosis is a leading neurological condition among young adults, affecting more than 400,000 Americans. While there is no known cause or cure for MS, the support of loved ones, care partners, and organizations such as MSAA is vital to improving their quality of life. MSAA encourages everyone to learn more about multiple sclerosis during the month of March, and to help raise much-needed awareness and support for everyone affected by MS."

There are many ways to join the conversation about MS this month. Here are a few of them.

* Helpful Tools for Relapse

Management (week of March 12): With support through an educational grant from Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, MSAA will host a live webinar on Helpful Tools for MS Relapse Management featuring Elizabeth Crabtree-Hartman, MD on Tuesday, March 13 from 8:00 PM – 9:00 PM EST, as well as an "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) program with Annette Okai, MD on Monday, March 12 from 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM EST on MSAA's free online forum, My MSAA Community.

*** Brain Preservation and Cognition** (week of March 19): Supported through an educational grant from Celgene, MSAA will offer five educational programs across the country, present the results of a national patient brain preservation and cognition survey, and host an AMA with Rohit Bakshi, MD, FAAN on Monday, March 19 from 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM EST on MSAA's Facebook page.

*** Healthy Living with Primary-Progressive MS** (week of March 26): MSAA has dedicated the last week of MS Awareness Month to promoting healthy living with primary-progressive MS. With support through an educational grant from Genentech, MSAA will sponsor five educational programs and host the final AMA on March 29 at 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM EST on MSAA's Facebook page with Steven Bromley, MD.

With March also playing host to Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month, there are a host of resources out there for individuals looking to spread awareness and engage in the greater conversation. Most notably, the Social Security Administration (SSA) compiled a rundown of information regarding job accommodations for those with CP.

From the SSA: Job seekers with CP can succeed with the right supports, such as mentors, training and education, and reasonable workplace accommodations. Reasonable accommodations are changes to a job, workplace or work process that help you perform required tasks in your role. You can talk with your employer about changes that will help ensure your success on the job.

Check out the Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Cerebral Palsy (CP) from the Job Accommodation Network to learn more about workplace supports for employees with CP. You can view the series here: <https://askjan.org/media/CP.html>.

Remember to spread the word about CP and MS awareness not only all month long but every month of the year.





Pictured from left are Lesia Walker and Teresa Roberts at the Farm to Table Expo at the Farmers Market in Forest Park. Georgia Industries for the Blind currently has a contract with Georgia Grown to make and distribute products made here in Georgia.

Success!

How Several Clients Went to Work

By Communications Specialist Tom Connelly

VR in Georgia continues to be instrumental in putting people back to work. Keith Williams and Daniel Chafin of Thomasville, as well as Rodger Hall, Denethia Redding, and Dorothy Tompkins of Albany can attest to that.

Mr. Williams sought VR services because he has a hidden disability and needed assistance finding employment. His counselor, Cindy Newsome, CRC, provided him with five services to help him become gainfully employed as an industrial machine mechanic, and because of that, he now works at Five Star Heating and Cooling.

Among the services provided to Mr. Williams were counseling and guidance, job placement, as well as financial assistance which allowed the client to attend technical college. Mr. Williams found Ms. Newsome to be friendly and helpful and responsive to his concerns. He also stated that Ms. Newsome helped him the most of any of the providers who worked with him. Mr. Williams said he would gladly recommend the agency to anyone who has a disability and is seeking employment.

Daniel Chafin entered services with the agency because he needed assistance with school. Ms. Newsome served as this client's counselor too. To help Mr. Chafin in the academic-related field as well as assist him in his pursuit to find gainful employment, GVRA provided financial assistance which helped him pay for tuition, books and supplies at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. Ms. Newsome also provided Mr. Chafin with counseling and guidance and job placement services.

He is currently employed as a sales rep,

wholesale, at Chitty Supply Company. He earns \$430 a week. As a result of his experience with VR, he said he was satisfied with the services he received from the agency. He cited Ms. Newsome as being "very helpful" and stated that he would gladly recommend GVRA to anyone who has a disability and wants to work.

Rodger Hall's life intersected with VR because he needed hearing aids. Catherine Beaty, CRC, served as his counselor. GVRA provided him with services including paying a dispensing fee and purchasing him a binaural hearing aid as well as an assistive technology evaluation and job follow-up.

As a result of Ms. Beaty's efforts, Mr. Hall secured employment at Albany State University as a painter, construction and maintenance person. He works full-time, earning \$440 a week. Because of his experience with Ms. Beaty, Mr. Hall stated that she was friendly, kind and responsive. Mr. Hall would gladly recommend the agency to anyone with a disability who is seeking employment.

Ms. Redding became a VR client because she suffers from asthma and needed assistance in obtaining employment. Latronda Rogers, CRC, served as her counselor. Ms. Rogers provided Ms. Redding with services such as job placement/development and training and initiation of ongoing supports. Ms. Redding found employment at the Albany Mall working as a janitor; in this capacity, she works 20 hours a week, earning \$145 on a weekly basis. She said she would gladly recommend GVRA to anyone who has a disability and is seeking employment.



Ms. Tompkins became involved with the organization after she experienced difficulty obtaining employment due to her disability. Gwen Sawyer, CRC, served as client's counselor and provided much relief and assistance. She provided Ms. Tompkins with more than 20 services in an effort to helping this client secure gainful employment. Among this list of services were prescription drugs, job placement and job follow-up, assistive technology

evaluation and services related to her visual disability. In addition, Ms. Tompkins received a criminal records background check and support services, among others. With VR assistance, she obtained employment as a laundry and dry-cleaning worker at Clarius Linen System. Ms. Tompkins works 40 hours a week, earning \$577 for this.

A New Chapter

A New Sensory Team Starts Work in Atlanta

By Assistant Director of Blind Services Shirley Robinson

February 15 marked the start date for the new Blind and Visually Impaired Sensory Team in Metro Atlanta. This team is made up of dedicated staff serving blind and visually-impaired clients in the Atlanta Area.

Team Lead Pricilla Peters-Ward out of the DeKalb/Rockdale office will be providing guidance and supervision to the following staff: Freddy Honeycutt, CRC DeKalb/Rockdale; Nicole Walden, PRC Norcross; Rebecca Giquel, CA DeKalb/Norcross; Miranda Lemon, CRC Clayton, Henry, Fayette; Javonda Wilson, CA DeKalb/Clayton, Henry, Fayette; Jennifer Spates, PRC Cobb; Jatoya Sanders, PRC Fulton; and Tia Ricks, CA Cobb/Fulton. These dedicated staff members will not only still serve clients in their local offices but they'll also provide services to blind and visually impaired consumers in their area.

Designated staff for both blind and visually impaired as well as deaf and hard of hearing clients have been identified around the state and will begin providing services to clients in March. The goal is to improve services for VR clients in Georgia with sensory disabilities and designate staff in their area to serve them. Director of Blind

and Deaf Services, Denine Woodson, Director of Field Services Lauren Knox, and the assistant field services directors Bernadette Amerein, Julie OConnor, Renee Giedl, and Tamika Wright have been working hard together to make this happen!

Additional support will be provided to the designated staff by the sensory team in the form of trainings, case reviews and consultations. Interdisciplinary meetings for blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard of hearing clients are also being held around the state to allow VR staff with any involvement with these consumers to participate.

A seven-part-module series is currently being developed to provide training on sensory related issues to staff.

The first of these Modules will begin in March. Please keep a look out for these announcements in your email box!



A Grand Unveiling

The E3 Program Launches New Apps

Last month, the E3 program officially launched two app games available for immediate download from the Apple and Google Play stores. During an official launch event on February 19th, attendees received a sneak peek of the games as well as an update on the progress of the E3 program throughout the state.

The first of these two apps, 'Souptastic' challenges students by having them take on the role of a chef in a kitchen. The game incorporates real-world scenarios and educational modules with colorful characters. Students have the ability to learn time management skills as well as some of the basic skills required for customer-facing jobs.

The other game, 'Get That Gig', challenges students to build memory skills by playing through five decks of memory cards, which focus on subjects like high demand careers, healthy living habits, household chores that build transferable skills, appropriate work attire, and soft skills. At the end of each game, students are encouraged to learn more on the selected subject by visiting the www.e3georgia.org for additional resources and information.

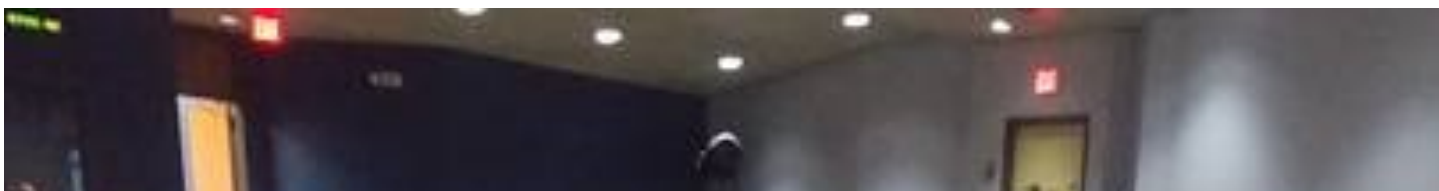
"The E3 Team has worked for many months to create a platform that is relevant to students with disabilities. The app launch unveiling was beyond my expectations,"

said Director of Transition Services Lauri Tuten. "The Souptastic app alone has proven to have met the mark because several adults, including myself, cannot master it and the students play it with ease! Each app has a different approach and is a model for what E3 is about – Explore, Engage, Employ activities through technology that lead students to meaningful and successful careers. I am extremely proud of the work the E3 Team has accomplished."



Pictured: (back row left) Tanya Wise, Lila Young, Tiffany Brown, Shelley Kraft, Sondra Hudson, Charlotte Young and Ingrid O'Neal. (front left) Rita Young (front right) Jenear Kidd





Pictured are Chief Client Management Officer Dale Arnold and Career Pathways Specialist Charlotte Young at the E3 app unveiling event in February.



Workforce Development

It's a Team Effort That Never Stops

By Parrish Walton for GPB

Sean Casey runs the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

Casey's organization—he never refers to it as an agency—helps prepare some of Georgia's most vulnerable citizens, those with a disability, to thrive in the workplace. They do this for free.

"If you work with us and are able to place clients with you, I don't send you a bill," Casey said. "We provide that service for free."

GVRA is one of the main partners of Georgia's Workforce Division. The others include Georgia's Department of Labor and the Technical College System of Georgia.

Most of the heavy lifting within the Workforce Division is done by the Local Workforce Development Areas around the state.

Georgia's economy is humming along, and with unemployment just below five percent, some agencies might sit back and take in the success. The Workforce Division isn't one of them.

Deputy Commissioner Ben Hames has said when unemployment gets low the division's work is ever more important. For businesses in 2018 it all comes down to one thing: talent.

As Hames sees it, workforce development is all about cultivating a talent base that industry wants and needs. Perhaps no other partner is as important in aiding that cultivation than the Technical College System of Georgia. What TSCG provides is an avenue to grow the talent base in Georgia for many positions that are in demand.

The Workforce Division is going to move under TCSG's umbrella beginning in July of this year to better connect the two entities. So workforce can help to identify the people who fit the mold of a TCSG student and then TCSG takes over to educate and train them for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

"Right now in Georgia there are jobs out there for people, even though unemployment is very low, and the jobs that are out there are highly skilled," said Matt Arthur, TCSG's Commissioner. "We hear that from companies all the time. So we have to train more and more people in order to get these jobs. This means our students are going to walk out of our programs, get a job, and be able to go full speed on the first day."

As Arthur said, there are available jobs in Georgia—lots of them, in fact. Per most estimates there are at least 250,000 open positions in Georgia right now. We also have a severe need for skilled labor, like welders, mechanics, commercial truck drivers (CDL drivers), and healthcare workers.

Let's take CDL drivers. Per a 2015 CNN article, "there will be a shortage of nearly 50,000 truckers in the United States by the end of this year, according a new report by the American Trucking Associations (ATA). That's up from a shortage of 30,000 drivers just two years ago, and 20,000 drivers a decade ago."

These positions pay well, too, as the median annual wage for a truck driver for a private company is \$73,000. Take it from someone with a liberal arts degree... that's a lot. Welders, like Skylar Huggett, who we profiled last summer, are also in high



demand. These are skilled positions that pay well and offer a chance at a real career. This is where TCSG comes in. When you enroll into programs at TCSG, you can trust you're going to be taught the skills the marketplace demands.

And it doesn't take four years like a traditional degree usually does.

"We guarantee our graduates," Arthur said. "If an industry hires one of our graduates and they're not trained and skilled we take them back free of charge and we re-train them."

Every program taught at TCSG is done so because Georgia industries need labor for it. That's not to knock a philosophy degree, because those have value. But that's not what TCSG does.

They speak with industries to ensure the programs taught at TCSG colleges lead to gainful employment upon completion.

Another key partner in workforce development is the Department of Labor, which offers no-fee assistance in its career centers and even has a Georgia jobs board that currently has more than 100,000 open positions available.

If you're looking for help in landing a job in Georgia, try out one of the many GDOL career centers around the state.

There are teams of people around the state in various departments that have a goal of ensuring any Georgian with the desire to participate in the economy can do so.

If you're qualified for training options via the workforce division we can help point you in the right direction. Perhaps a TCSG program is a better fit, in which case they are here to help.

Or maybe you have a disability and need special assistance from GVRA. There's help and guidance for you, too.

Every department has relationships with each other and can work with one another to better serve Georgia citizens and its business leaders.

The end goal is to improve the state's economy by improving the standing of its citizens.

And he's exactly right. The goal is to ensure Georgians have an avenue to success in life by ensuring they have the necessary skills to handle the modern economy.

"There are powerful forces at play in terms of creative destruction and entire segments of our economy are being reshaped," Hames said. "Everybody has to be engaged in workforce development and continuous learning. Today, what you tell a young person entering the workforce is that they will have many jobs over the course of their career, but their JOB over the course of their career is lifelong learning."

That's what Georgia has in view as we tackle workforce development and everyone is engaged, from Governor Deal down to the staff at the local workforce development areas and professors at TCSG institutions to the specialists at GVRA.

Workforce development in Georgia aims to help all Georgia citizens and is a team effort. If you or someone you know could use help in getting on the path to employment, please don't hesitate to reach out.





Congressman Drew Ferguson recently spent a day touring the campus of Roosevelt Warm Springs. Here's what he had to say: "Today I had the opportunity to tour the GVRA in Warm Springs. This organization does phenomenal work to help people with disabilities achieve independence and meaningful employment."



Working Wonder

The Nomination For a GIB Employee

By GIB Co-Director Luis Narimatsu

For the past three years, the skills and abilities Chris Gore has demonstrated have come to exemplify the definition of a "Working Wonder." Chris has become a valued part of numerous teams in different departments, all of which produce quality goods at Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB).

GIB is a manufacturing and warehousing operation, the mission of which is to provide employment opportunities for people who are blind. Based in Bainbridge, it is one of the five statutory programs operated by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA).

Chris' supervisors say he consistently completes all assignments in an exceptional manner. He demonstrates the highest levels of effort, quality of work and initiative, and he has earned a reputation for going above and beyond.

Born in Chattanooga and raised in Ringgold, Georgia, Chris was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) at the early age of 12. This genetic disorder is known to cause peripheral blindness and difficulty seeing at night. Despite this diagnosis, Chris never slowed down. Since an early age, he did odd jobs and served customers at his stepfather's truck stop. Chris also helped out on the family farm, where he tended cows, pigs and two fully stocked ponds with bass, bream and catfish. In his spare time, he shared a love of NASCAR races with his stepfather. Together, the two visited almost every NASCAR track on the east coast.

Chris went to public school until he graduated, his RP presenting challenges along the way. Chris recalls, "Most of the time, I couldn't see the board from the back

of the classroom because of my RP, so I had to prop myself on the teacher's desk if all the desks in the front of the class were taken up".

Despite his vision loss, Chris still enjoyed participating in sports. He played football and baseball up until he entered high school. Chris comments, "As my RP progressed, I finally had to give up playing sports. I was having a hard time keeping my eye on the ball."

One of his most difficult decisions came the day he realized he had to give up driving. He was only 20, and his RP made it unsafe to continue behind the wheel.

"It is like losing your independence," Chris said. "Not being able to drive my prize possession, my 2003 Chevy Silverado Super Sport was heartbreaking."

These were trying times for Chris; however, he still considers himself blessed, with good friends always there giving him support.

"People say I have a good sense of humor," he said. "I am always joking about my blindness, you know. I am thankful for the opportunity of being able to see as long as I have, and not have my sight taken away all of a sudden like it happens when you have an accident or an illness."

After his mom passed away, Chris left the farm and went to live with his grandmother. He understood he needed to find a job, but he encountered problems. His grandmother contacted the Vocational Rehabilitation office in the area and spoke with a Counselor, who shared information about career opportunities at GIB.



"I went to visit the Bainbridge plant. Two days later I was hired, and I was so excited about being able to finally get out and be around people who had been able to overcome their blindness and move ahead in life," he said.

While Chris was thrilled with his new opportunity, he knew it meant leaving behind family and friends and the familiar environment he had known since he was a child. "I was going to be alone, living on my own, taking care of myself," he explained.

Moving across the state was a challenge Chris was willing to take. "I knew Tallahassee was close by and Panama City Beach, so I figured it couldn't be too bad," recalled Chris.

In his three years with GIB, Chris has been assigned to various departments such as screen printing, pillows, paper products and assembly. He has held numerous production jobs such as heat transfer, flags, round corner, EZ machine operator, hole punch operator, packer, heat sealer,

compressor operator, grommet machine operator, and he also helps load trucks when necessary.

Teresa Roberts, GIB Plant Manager says about Chris, "Chris is a good communicator to all fellow employees as well as with supervisors and is always willing to help in any of his trained positions when needed and always with a smile."

"Working at GIB has been a great way of keeping me occupied. I like learning new things," Chris said. "I always tell people, if there something to do, just tell me, I will never say no."

For his ability to turn challenges into opportunities, for being an excellent role model of productive behavior and for his contributions to the success of GIB in the past three years, we would like to nominate Chris Gore for your prestigious Working Wonder Award.

Editor's Note: The Working Wonder Award is given annually through Georgia Enterprises.



Pilot Project with GaDOE

What It's All About

Partnership is the name of the game, and it is a big part of providing the best services possible. That's why the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), Division of Special Education Services and Supports, recently began providing technical assistance to transition-aged youth. With an expanded scope of work for students with disabilities, collaboration is essential. To meet this goal, a strong partnership with the Division of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) is required to support effective transition and graduate students college and career ready.

To meet the requirements of WIOA, GVRA recognizes capacity building is necessary as current staffing levels will not support the increased demand and need to support students with disabilities and their families across the state. In cooperation and planning with the GaDOE, a pilot program to add Career Specialists in five school districts to support for the integration of Assistive Technology and Assistive Work Technology through a pilot program during the 2017-2018 school year allowing time to build resources and supports as well as an infrastructure to support the expanded work. To meet this need, state level dedicated positions will also be required to provide alignment with the mission of both organizations and focus work in the intended manner. Further, partnership with pilot Local Education Agencies (LEA) will be critical in vetting the need for the support services and determining the long-range plan that will effectively support the LEA including the teachers, families and most importantly, students.

The five required pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) as identified by

WIOA to be provided to students with disabilities ages 14-21 years are:

- 1) Job exploration counseling to assist students with disabilities in understanding their work related strengths and interests and what career possibilities there are;
- 2) Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment in the community to the maximum extent possible;
- 3) Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education;
- 4) Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and
- 5) Instruction in self-advocacy (including instruction in person-centered planning), which may include peer mentoring (including peer mentoring from individuals with disabilities working in competitive integrated employment).

On February 1, 2018, Sherese Dennard, previous CPS with E3, and Melissa Cochran, previous VR Team Lead in Carrollton, were selected for the Career Pathway Coordinator positions. They are embedded in GaDOE in the CTAE department and will be immersed in the work of CTAE and Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy. The Career Pathways Coordinators will work

directly with the Career Specialists for Transition and the pilot schools to assist in delivering instruction in Self Advocacy/Self Determination and ensuring placement of students with disabilities in Career Pathways, WBL, and Dual Enrollment. Through the relationship with GaDOE, GVRA Transition Staff have been granted access to the district level data and teacher resources in the State Longitudinal Data

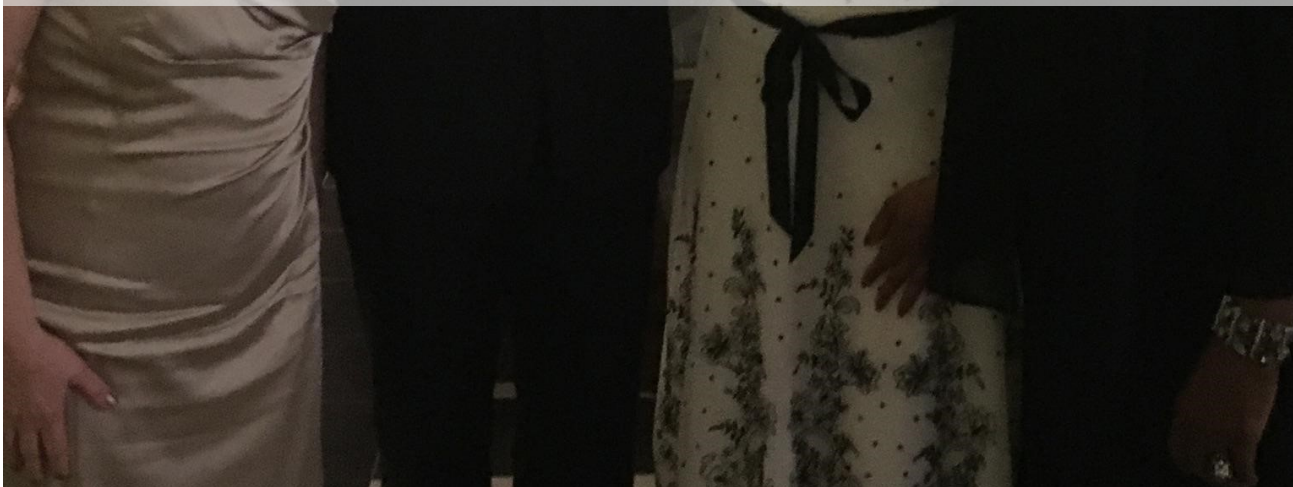
System which houses hundreds of CTAE curriculum and activities adhering to CTAE Standards. A team, which includes the Career Pathway Coordinators and two GVRA Academic Transition Teachers, are selecting those that meet Pre-ETS criteria. The team will package the curriculum and train VR staff to deliver to students.

RWS Society Ball

Coming Together for a Cause



Roosevelt Warm Springs recently played host to its annual Society Ball. This year, thousands of dollars were raised for the RWS Development Fund, which goes to supporting the campus and its students.



The Connection Hub

Office of Strategy and Innovation

It's Strategic Planning time and the Office of Strategy & Innovation (S&I) wants to remind everyone that Strategic Planning helps to ensure agency goals are prioritized in accordance with Governor Deal's goals and vision for the state. Having a strategic plan identifies the resources and actions that will be necessary to achieve those goals.

Each GVRA department/unit should consider strategic planning an opportunity to evaluate services provided and to think critically about ways to improve processes and performance to provide better and more efficient services to Georgia's citizens.

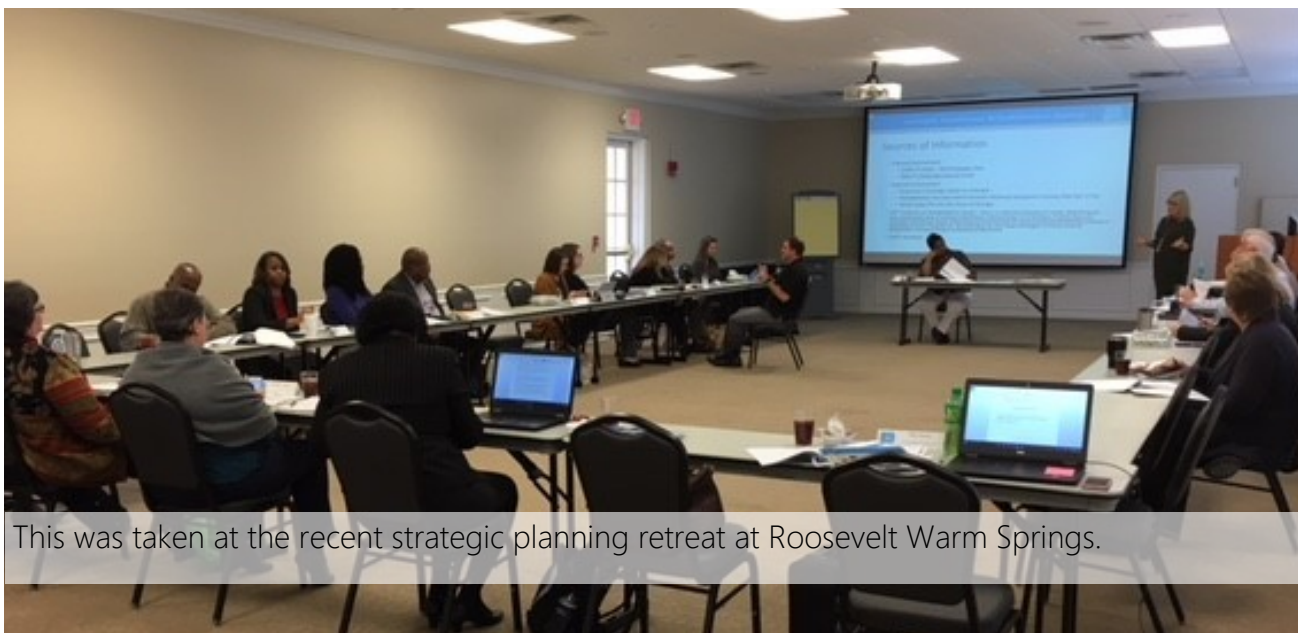
GVRA's own agency strategic plan is due June 30, so the S&I unit will be working with Executive Director Sean Casey and various leadership staff to not only ensure its timely completion but to make sure all agency departments/units are aware of what the agency goals include.

Also, congratulations to Program Evaluator Ms. Angel Bryant as she has been accepted into the one year Program Evaluation and

Quality Assurance (PEQA) Certification program that begins April 1! Good luck Angel!

The S&I unit's Grants Manager, Mrs. Joycelyn Fowler is currently working with Assistant Director of Blind Services Shirley Robinson on three grant opportunities that Ms. Robinson thinks could make a major impact on services. Stay tuned for results!

The S&I team of Rajaunnda Gandy & Robin Blount recently completed its second strategic planning session with the Strategic Planning staff from Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS). Director Lee Brinkley Bryan and her staff did a fantastic job identifying goals, objectives and strategies to reach them. Ms. Bryan formed her own strategic planning committee and asked staff from across the campus to provide input. The final plan is being edited by the office of S&I and will be the first program strategic plan to be completed for 2018.



This was taken at the recent strategic planning retreat at Roosevelt Warm Springs.



DAS Employee of the Month

Congratulations Are In Order

Submitted by Priscilla Walker

"I nominate Chandra Shields for employee of the month. [Our team] faces many challenges. These challenges become magnified when working under-staffed.

Chandra Shields consistently rises above the problems. She never falls behind in her work. In addition to staying on top of her own duties, Chandra does not hesitate to offer her assistance to co-workers in the unit, who may need it. She is always pleasant and considerate of others.

Ms. Shields' exemplary customer service stretches far beyond the walls of this building, as we were recently made aware of, on more than one occasion. We recently received an email sent to me from an examiner in one of our assisting states,

showing what an asset Chandra Shields is to Georgia DDS. We're very fortunate to have her on our team!"



FAA Sends Letter of Support

GVRA recently received a letter from support from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Office of Civil Rights.

The letter noted that the partnership began in 2016 when the FAA teamed with GVRA to host a successful job fair, an event which ultimately led to the hiring of multiple GVRA clients at the federal organization.

In addition, GVRA staff conducted training with the FAA Regional Management Team, and later, the FAA played host to high school students with disabilities on a tour of the air traffic control tower at Hartsfield Jackson

International Airport.

"The FAA Office of Civil Rights values the partnership with GVRA, and we look forward to working together on future initiatives," the letter concludes.

A special thank you to our partners at the FAA for all they've done to help individuals with disabilities find and enjoy meaningful work.



Calendar of Events

Make Sure to Save the Date

March 20 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

SRC Public Hearing
Bibb County Schools Professional Learning Annex
2007 Riverside Drive, Suite D
Macon, GA 31204

March 22 starts at 8 a.m.

Bobby Dodd Breakfast of Champions
Cobb Galleria Centre
2 Galleria Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30339

March 21, 2018 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

SRC Public Hearing
The Tommy Nobis Center
1480 Bells Ferry Road
Marietta, GA 30066

March 22nd from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

SRC Public Hearing
The Oaks at Lanier College and Career Academy
2723 Tumbling Creek Road
Gainesville, GA 30504

April 19 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

SRC Public Hearing
Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
Albany VR Office
1107 West Broad Avenue, Suite A
Albany, GA 31707

Thank You

There's so many people who contribute every month to this newsletter, it would be impossible to thank them all in one short column. But still, this publication wouldn't be possible without their support and hard work.

So, as always, thank you to everyone who makes this newsletter a reality every month.

That said, this newsletter belongs to everyone who enjoys it, and we want to hear from you.

Do you have suggestions about how to improve this newsletter or stories that people

might find interesting? Do you have events for the calendar or know someone who make a good profile? These are all things you can submit to GVRA Communications Manager John P. Boan at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov.

Everyone is encouraged to submit content and help us make this newsletter as good as it possibly can be.

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